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The Poetic Theory of T.S. Eliot: An Investigation

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THE POETIC THEORY OF T.S. ELIOT: AN INVESTIGATION

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THE POETIC THEORY OF
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Few critics have had a greater impact upon the theory of poetry than T.S. Eliot. His critical works, spanning the decades of his literary career, embod a theory of poetry and by a careful scrutiny of his many essays, reviews, and interviews, it is possible to formulate definite requirements for works in the genre of poetry. Beginning with the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in 1919, Eliot stresses certain aspects of poetry that must be carefully considered by the poet, and Eliot does not radically alter his attitudes throughout his career.

Eliot insists in his earliest essays that the poet must recognize the value of tradition to his work. To Eliot, tradition represents not only a knowledge of the past, but an assimilation of this past into one's life. The artist must have a definite sense of tradition and realize that his work does not stand apart from all other art. Rather, each new work of art will modify the old existing order. Another element of poetry that Eliot considers important is prosody. Eliot insists that

free verse is impossible; the poet can only thoroughly master technique, then has he the freedom to depart from the standard forms. Eliot cautions the poet to not sacrifice the sense of a line for its sound, yet always be aware that the musicality reinforces the meaning of the poem.

Perhaps the most familiar term Eliot uses is objective correlative. Although much has been written about his meaning, Eliot basically uses the term to signify the objectification of emotions and thoughts; it is a technique to elevate the subjective into the objective, while retaining a sense of immediacy. Eliot never concedes that poetry should only be a personal statement; the poet may begin with very personal feelings, but he must transform them into an impersonal statement. This demand by Eliot for impersonality includes his belief that the poet can best express the universal through the particular. He believes the imagery should be definite and specific. The poet should also use the vernacular speech of his era; he must avoid the appearance of artificiality of language.

Finally Eliot comes to a clear position toward the role of philsoophy in poetry. Early in his career he argued that no poet should sacrifice the quality of the poem artistically in order to employ it as a vehicle for a particular philosophy. Eliot, recognizing that a poet will incorporate personal beliefs into the poem, insists

that these views should be there almost unconsciously. A too conscious striving to use poetry only as a statement of philosophy Eliot views as corrupting the role poetry should play. To Eliot, the function of poetry is to serve as an aesthetically satisfying expression of universal truths.

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Introduction

Negative attitudes direct much of life, from street signs to certain moral codes. Often it is easier to say what cannot be true than to specify what can be true; to give restraints than to give freedoms; to deny than to affirm. From Aristotle to contemporary scholars, literary critics have chosen to follow such a course at times. T.S. Eliot in the "Preface" to his collection of early critical essays The Sacred Wood employs such a technique when he states that poetry is not the "inculcation of morals, or the direction of politics"; nor does Eliot believe that poetry should be viewed as religion, or its substitute; Eliot also notes that the composition of poetry should not be considered a "formula."[1] However, Eliot does not deny that poetry is somehow involved with all of these concepts, and with more. As Russell Kirk notes in his study Eliot and His Age: T.S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century, Eliot clearly said the poet should not serve as a politician, yet Eliot realized that the poet's work was part of the public social scheme.[2]

Eliot called poetry an "amusement" (SW, p. viii), but any reader quickly realizes that Eliot did not write only to amuse his reader, at least, not in the standard

definition of the word. What, then, did Thomas Stearns Eliot conceive poetry to be? It remains not only a legitimate question, but one of great importance to the student of literature because few men have ever had a greater impact upon the thoughts of their peers and successors than T.S. Eliot. Kirk summarizes well the role Eliot filled when he states that "no other poet has been so much criticized and commented upon, in his own lifetime, as was Eliot" (p. 398). Kirk could probably have safely extended his statement to include the period since Eliot's death in 1965, because even if the comments are negative, and the critics have used Eliot as a point from which to depart, at times radically, in their theory, Eliot's theory and poetry remain powerful forces in the literary world. A careful investigation of his poetic theory should prove most interesting.

T.S. Eliot, born in St. Louis in 1888 was the descendant of several generations of Americans; Andrew Eliot, who came to the colonies in 1667, began the ancestral line that included a writer, several apparently successful businessmen, university presidents, and ministers. Eliot matured in a family with a definite sense of the past, of religion, and of community responsibility. His education began at Smith Academy (now defunct) and continued at Harvard College, where Eliot enrolled in 1906. There would be much during his undergraduate years in Cambridge to influence Eliot's thought, but it would be in England, not

in the United States (to which he would return only infrequently), that Eliot would come to understand and to express his concept of poetry--a concept not fully verbalized until after Eliot had incorporated it into some of his major poems.

Each critic of Eliot seems to have a favorite individual or school of thought to nominate as a shaping influence on Eliot's reflections, and certainly many arguments could be offered to support a wide range of influences; Fei-Pai Lu in his study T.S. Eliot-The Dialectical Structure of his Theory of Poetry correctly points out that many studies which attempt to prove sources are not successful because the critics are too anxious to find "verbal collation" in Eliot instead of similar "critical principles."[3]

What must be remembered is that for a scholar such as Eliot, familiar with classical and contemporary writers, it would be virtually impossible to point to one literary and philosophical figure as the dominant force, because a mind such as his constantly probes, analyzes, adapts, and adopts material. As Kirk emphasizes, while Eliot was influenced by several thinkers and poets, he did not imitate others; rather, his relationship was more of a meeting of the minds (p. 34). However, it is possible to look at some individuals whose influence on Eliot must have been substantial. Probably the first to be thought of as a major force is Francis A. Bradley, the man whose

philosophy Eliot chose as the subject of his doctoral dissertation for Harvard. Although much of Bradley's thought became unacceptable to Eliot, certain elements do remain. Armin Paul Frank, in his study "Eliot's Objective Correlative and the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley," suggests that Bradley is probably the "most immediate" source for certain elements in Eliot's thought, especially the concept of an objective correlative, which became one of the tenets of Eliot's theory.[4] Lewis Freed, discussing a similar idea, in T.S. Eliot: Aesthetics and History, describes Bradley's view of feelings and thoughts: "when feeling is transformed into thought, it is no longer pure feeling, that is, no longer, as Bradley has it, immediate; it has become an object of thought, an idea touched with ideality. Hence feeling as such can never be described, for to think of it is to transform it. Feeling can be felt, but it can be known only by its objectification in thought, action, art."[5] This belief will later echo in Eliot's view of the function of the objective correlative. Kirk also agrees that Bradley was an influence on Eliot. Kirk notes that Eliot, in coming to see Bradley's position of the ability of the self to perceive, realized that in order to come to an understanding of being human, it would be necessary to plunge deeper than "abstruse ideas," and find that basis on which man structures his life, and it is at this point that Kirk believes Eliot came to see the importance of the moral imagination--that sense that,

entering the mind over a long period of time, recognizes tradition and "looks to theology and history and human letters . . . for evidence . . . of permanent things" (p. 47). Finally, Hugh Kenner in The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot says Bradley was comparable to a "stain" in Eliot's mind--something that affected all things that passed through it; also Bradley, whose philosophy was not clearly defined, contributed three ideas to Eliot's developing sensibilities: he solved one of Eliot's critical problems by giving him a viewpoint toward tradition; he freed Eliot from the influence of poets such as LaForgue (who had affected the role of an "ironist with his back to the wall") because Bradley said all is artificial in personality; and he gave Eliot a view of poetry as something not for the expression of individuality but with a larger role to fill.[6]

Another important exposure for Eliot as a young man occurred when, at nineteen, he read The Symbolist Movement in Literature and through this (according to Leonard Unger in T.S. Eliot) became aware of Jules LaForgue--and other symbolist poets. Unger argues that LaForgue is the starting point for much of Eliot's view of poetry.[7] Even here, though, Unger admits that a Bradlian influence, especially in the concept of an objective correlative, can be found, along with the emphasis on isolation stressed in both Bradley and LaForgue (p. 17).

Concerning Eliot's development of a critical sense, F.W. Bateson's article "T.S. Eliot: Impersonality Fifty Years After" states that Reny de Gourmont was the critic who greatly influenced Eliot, just as LaForgue was the poet.[8] Of course, Eliot goes beyond these writers, and comes to criticize them for their failures. Ants Oras, in his discussion of Eliot's critical theory (The Critical Ideas of T.S. Eliot) says that while Eliot could support deGourmont because he emphasized qualities (such as preciseness in poetry) which Eliot viewed as important, this support did not prevent Eliot's declaring deGourmont wrong in his emphasis on individual aesthetics--a position Eliot believed to be eccentric at best.[9] Other influences on Eliot as a young poet at Harvard mentioned by F.O. Matthiessen in his study The Achievement of T.S. Eliot include George Santayana and Irving Babbitt,[10] while Elizabeth Schneider in T.S. Eliot: The Pattern in the Carpet says that other early forces on Eliot would include John Davidson and W.E. Herley; from these men Eliot "got the idea that one could write poetry in an English such as one would speak oneself. A colloquial idiom."[11] In looking for influences not quite so contemporary with Eliot, Aristotle, with his emphasis on diction, must be considered. Another school that interested, and influenced, Eliot was that of the metaphysical poets. Robert Martin Adams' article "Donne and Eliot: Metaphysicals" suggests links between the environment of a typical metaphysical

poet and that of Eliot in the early twentieth century--both found themselves in a world where faith was being lost; both found older forms unsatisfactory for expression of their sentiments; both saw their culture, based on tradition, threatened by a new, less than adequate doctrine; both searched for, and expressed, deeper, more complex feelings.[12] One other individual who is often mentioned in conjunction with Eliot is Walter Pater, and Frank Kermode in the article "Dissociation of Sensibility" sees Pater as a link joining the theories of those like John Donne and the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Imagists.[13]

Certainly Pater, who is described by David J. Delauria as the "archetype of Romantic Criticism," may have provided Eliot with the "terms of . . . condemnation of romantic art."[14] Oras points out that the use (or abuse, to Eliot) of romantic principles by those like Pater may partially explain why Eliot came to emphasize tradition and the classical approach (pp. 70-71).

Of course after considering some possible and probable sources on Eliot one notes with interest that Eliot said in his essay "Blake" that education for an artist is

> hindered rather than helped by the ordinary processes of society which constitute education for the ordinary man. For these processes consist largely in the acquisition of impersonal ideas

> which obscure what we really are and feel. . . . It is the conformity which the accumulation of knowledge is apt to impose that is harmful.[15]

Eliot here views "conformity" not as being a part of one's time, but rather as being unable to stand apart and view society as it is, and evaluate the ideas, instead of blandly accepting them.

In view of such varied sources for a theoretical basis in an approach to art, and the possibility that indeed each of these men may have played a role in the mature Eliot's mind, what, then, did Eliot come to believe to be the role of poetry and of the poet?

In his critical writings, which cover a period of almost fifty years, Eliot laid down a system of thought about poetry (although he does expound certain points at different times, and emphasize different facets in various essays) the tenets of which do not radically change throughout his life. Nearing the end of his critical career he did say that perhaps he had been "arrogant" in tone in early essays, yet he never fully retracted any of his creed, nor really practiced against it (although he has been accused of just this). Only in the one area of the need for philosophical belief does Eliot indicate change--and this could be viewed as a clarification of Eliot's thought. His first major volume, The Sacred Wood, published in 1920, was reviewed by Richard Aldington,

who, seeing in Eliot a very valuable young thinker, praised him as one "who has imposed an order on our chaos, our intellectual anarchy; he throws us a plank as we drown in a sea of platitudes and foaming stupidities."[16] Whatever that "plank" was, Kirk, fifty years later, said that Eliot

> made the poet's voice heard again, and thereby triumphed; knowing the community of souls, he freed others from captivity to time and lonely ego; in the teeth of winds of doctrine, he attested the permanent things. And his communication is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living. (p. 419)

Chapter I

Theory of the Early Years--1919-1921

The portion of theory that Eliot had thrown out early in his career did impose a certain order, stating criteria that should be met by those involved in poetry. Although these concepts fit together to form an overall pattern for poetry, it is possible to look at the components individually--remembering that, in the final analysis, the theory is a unit, just as Eliot believed the resulting poem to be a unit.

Oras, looking at Eliot's belief that literature is organic, quotes the German philosopher Rickirt, who defines organism as:

> a whole whose parts are its prerequisites, and hence it possesses a kind of conditional unity, namely in so far as only the cooperation of its various parts in a definite direction . . . makes it into an organism. (p. 58)

So it is with Eliot's poetic theory.

In 1919, Eliot published "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in The Egoist; it would be included the following year in The Sacred Wood. In this essay, Eliot indicates the basis on which he builds his theory.

As Kirk notes, this essay should have told Eliot's audience where Eliot was going, because, to Kirk, it represents Eliot from the beginning to the end of his career (p. 60). Bateson, in a more limited view, considers the essay as the essence of Eliot's critical thoughts during the period of his first two volumes of poems (p. 632), and Schneider states that the essay was not representative of the philosophical Eliot but only the way Eliot felt in 1919 (p. 56). How Miss Schneider separates the views of this essay from those expressed by the more mature, and supposedly philosophical Eliot, is not clear. Eliot would say in later years that perhaps the essay had been overexposed, but it remains central to an understanding of his ideas.

The first element to be stressed by Eliot in the essay is the role of tradition in the life of the artist. Stephen Tanner (in "T.S. Eliot and Paul Elmer More on Tradition") suggests that Eliot's view of the need for an historical sense may have come from Paul Elmer More (an individual involved in the New Humanism movement, like Irving Babbitt), who believed the historical view was needed to spot the truths of the various eras, because although tradition may not create standards, it may reveal them when a study of the past indicates a pattern of certain ideas found important. More, in a volume reviewed by Eliot the year preceding his publication of "Tradition

and the Individual Talent," discussed the work of the imagination on tradition and commented that there was no "surer test of the quality of a man's mind than the degree in which he feels the long remembered past as one of the immediate and vital laws of his being."[1] Matthiessen indicates that to understand why Eliot felt as he did about the past it is necessary to understand Eliot's view of the debt he owed to older poets and thinkers, because to Eliot, poetry should be a "fusing together" of many elements from the past (p. 10). Whatever the source of Eliot's view, he defined tradition as an historical sense which recognizes the legacy of the past and the continuance of tradition into the present. It is the concept that whatever has happened forms a whole, a unit, and wherever something new is introduced into this order, then the entire order is changed; the new modifies the old. All art is involved in this, and Eliot insists the the contemporary writer cannot ignore what has preceded him because this has determined what he is now (SE, pp. 4-5).

Grover Smith, in the article "Getting Used to T.S. Eliot", explains that this modifying occurred because

> when the present alters, our view of the past alters with it; a new masterpiece by changing the present automatically revises the past for those to whose awareness it penetrates.[2]

As the mental processes are changed, so are the results of these processes.

R.P. Blackmur, in his article "In the Hope of Straightening Things Out," defines Eliot's view of tradition as all that which is outside of us, both good and bad,[3] but Dras clarifies this when he theorizes that to Eliot, tradition is

> knowledge and assimilation of everything important and vital in the whole literary world to which a writer belongs, and he expects this knowledge to be utilized in the latter's creative work, which is to be a logical continuation of the valuable labors of the past. (p. 33)

Obviously, this "literary world" would encompass not only literature in a strict sense but also the world of ideas. Lu uses the expression "dynamic whole" to summarize Eliot's concept of tradition--not "repetition" or "evolution" of the past because "repetition furnishes no new parts; and evolution involves the replacement of the old by the new"[4] Kenner insists that Eliot did not understand tradition to be the general past, but only that part of it which has been "examined scrupulously" (p. 117). Eliot laments the lack of educational systems that demand this of the student. Aldington, in his review, lauds Eliot for having the correct view of the role of tradition--he contends it to be harmful either to worship the past, or to consider it "dead" (p. 345).

In a more restricted sense of the use of tradition and the past, Eliot states in his 1920 essay "Phillip Massinger" that one of the best tests for determining

the quality of a poet is his borrowing habits. As Eliot notes, "immature poets imitate; mature poets steal"; the good one will develop and reestablish his "stolen goods" into something even better while the weak poet will only be able to use the material in an obvious way (SE, p. 182). Also Eliot sees a linking of the poetry from the past to its modern counterpart. In the essay "Ben Jonson" in 1919, Eliot states that although the value of any poetry exceeds what i. can contribute to other poets, still there is a link between appreciating someone's work and the creation of one's own (SE, p. 127). As Oras points out, the use of tradition can help both the great and minor poet in rather practical ways by confronting him with what has been successfully or unsuccessfully attempted, thus allowing for concentration and economy and preventing wasted effort (pp. 57-58). In other words, tradition could fill one role as a springboard for the poet, and, as Eliot intimates in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," once a poet understands tradition and the past, he will come to have a clearer understanding of his own position (SE, p. 4).

Another aspect of the sense of tradition that is central to Eliot's theory is his concept of the recognition of the existence "of the timeless and of the temporal together," which Eliot believes results from the poet's correct understanding of tradition (SE, p. 4). This concept is found in all of Eliot's poetry, becoming especially important after his acceptance of Christianity.

Freed explains the idea by saying the past is not really history to Eliot because the "poet lives in the present and his awareness of the past is part of his present experience, so that the past and present are together in a present moment of consciousness" (p. 140).

This consciousness of timelessness coexisting with time is one example of the concept of unity held by Eliot. Matthiessen points out that Eliot believes, as an artist, in the "necessary union of intellect and emotion" (p. 149). Much of Eliot's theory of poetry centers around this attempt at fusion. His emphasis on order and technique in poetry reflects this basic concern, and in later essays he would discuss what should be done to restore unity. But in The Sacred Wood Eliot already recognizes that unity is a function of poetry. In the essay "Imperfect Critics" Eliot comments that the poetry of great writers like Marlowe and Shakespeare has a "quality of sensuous thought, or of thinking through the senses or of the senses thinking, of which the exact formula remains to be defined" (SW, p. 23). Freed declares that Eliot believes "unity of feeling" is the "essential principle of poetic form" (p. 17).

Allen Austin explores one aspect of Eliot's concept of unity in his article "Dissociation of Sensibility," and he indicates Eliot feels that a type of perception by the individual has certainly been lost since the period of

the metaphysical poets; this loss results in a lack of unity.[5] Matthiessen believes that Eliot's attraction to the Symbolist movement early in his career stemmed from its attempts to unify ideas, sensation, and emotions, and he also indicates that Eliot defends the "juxtaposition" of thought and images found in modern poetry as being valid, if it stems from an underlying unity (p. 16).

So, clearly, the role of unifier belongs to the poet. When in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot uses the comparison of the shred of platinum in the chemical solution to the mind of the poet with experiences and observations, Eliot assigns great responsibility to the poet, because (to follow the comparison) in such chemical equations, without the catalyst there would be no change or transmutation of the elements into another form; so the poet's mind serves as a cause of unification and of transformation. Once this has occurred, the final act of the poet is to verbalize the result. Matthiessen points out that to Eliot the poet should not be as concerned with pure intellectual speculation as with the "emotional equivalent of thought," because the function of poetry is emotional; but, as Matthiessen states, this belief makes the intellectual range and maturity of the poet even more important because he must be able to grasp and differentiate a wide variety of emotions (pp. 56-57). To those who would argue that it is not possible to express the intense emotions, Eliot replies in his essay "Rhetoric and Poetic

Drama" that the inability might result from either failure to examine the emotions, or poor quality of the emotions themselves (SE, p. 29). Eliot accepts no excuse for the poet's poor handling of emotions.

In another essay, "Marlowe," written in the same year, 1919, Eliot accuses Milton of rearing a "Chinese Wall" in poetry because he could not produce verse in which thought and feelings were unified, and he faults Tennyson for producing "crude" verse (which he differentiates from rough, that is, lacking technical mastery) because the verse was not able to express intricate emotions (pp. 100-01). So obviously Eliot believes that poetry must show unity of thought and feeling and express subtle nuances of sensibility. If, as Freed suggests, poetry to Eliot is "regarded as the verbal equivalent of states of mind or feeling" (p. 168), how is this goal to be reached? Obviously the verbalizing of personal emotions and events, as experienced by the poet, would not be adequate. To Eliot, this would be simply what the Romantics had done, and for the poet who is aware of tradition, it would not be possible to claim that his own sentiments alone would form poetry. Again, the essay "Tradition and Individual Talent" gives Eliot's answer. He says of the poet: "What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality," (SE, p. 7). Many lines have

been written in an attempt to explain this statement, yet Eliot surely means exactly what he says; he labels this the "impersonal" theory, and perhaps it serves to truly unify the other aspects of his theory, as expressed by 1920, because consciousness of tradition and the role of emotion and thought in poetry are brought together here. Even his discussion of prosody and the role of belief in poetry can be connected to this doctrine of impersonality.

Thomas Parkinson in his essay "Intimate and Impersonal: An Aspect of Modern Poetics" suggests that this attitude may have been in reaction to the general theory of poetry held during the 1890's, which "was essentially the theory abstractable from Pater's essay on style with its stress on the individuality of the artist. . . . Poetry was a subjective presentation of the world." This attitude, Parkinson believes, led to the view in 1910-1917 that was an escape from the concept of poetry as either highly realistic or subjective.[6] Another, more specific, influence is suggested by David E. Ward in his article "The Cult of Impersonality: Eliot, St. Augustine, and Flaubert" in which he speculates that two events served to formulate Eliot's theory of impersonality. One was Ezra Pound's emphasis on the criticism of Remy deGourmont from 1912 to 1920; and the other was the publication of James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

in 1917. Ward quotes a passage from this novel to illustrate his claim:

> The personality of the artist passes into narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea. . . . The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself. . . . The artist . . . remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence.[7]

Another reason for impersonalizing is suggested by Freed when he states that Eliot believed, in 1919, that the poet writes to understand his own feelings (p. 317). Frank mentions a similar idea in response to Eliot's separation of the suffering man and the creating mind (which Ward traces to Aristotle, p. 172). Frank emphasizes that the poet has to objectify the emotion in order to understand it himself; it is his method for grappling with the intensity of the feelings, and Frank intimates that the reader does not have to even come into view; the poet is satisfied when the poem is complete (p. 314). And Oras expresses something akin to this when he says Eliot indicates that "poetic creation is . . . a means of relief from anguish, as the transmutation of subjective disappointment into something soothing and impersonal" (p. 73). Eliot will say in later essays that indeed the finishing of the poem may give great relief to the poet,

but it is difficult to believe Eliot--or any poet--writes only for this purpose. If so, why publish the poem?

Eliot describes the process with the analogy of the platinum shred--not only does the mind of the poet serve as catalyst to join elements, but the catalyst is not in the final solution. Eliot continues by saying that in poetry,

> it is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple or crude or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. . . . . The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. (SE, p. 10)

Eliot also says in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that poetry is not to give a reader a personality or personal experiences, but rather to be a combining, a converting of these personal feelings into art (SE, p. 9). According to Eliot, poetry may result from either emotions or feelings on the part of the poet. Here Eliot may be faulted for failing to clarify his meanings for these terms. It would appear that Eliot uses the word "feelings" to represent more transitory, indefinite sensations which may come together to evoke a particular emotion. Lu

reaches a conclusion about as concrete as Eliot's definitions when he states that at times Eliot

> allies feelings with impression, sensation and emotion in opposition to thought; . . . sometimes he combines emotion with thought in opposition to feeling; . . . sometimes he merges all into one inclusive term such as experience or sensibility. (p. 12)

But underlying this problem of semantics remains Eliot's contention that it is not the emotions that are of great importance; it is the "intensity of the artistic process, the pressure . . . under which the fusion takes place" that really matters (SE, p. 8). In his essay on Ezra Pound, written in 1917, Eliot quotes some of Pound's advice about the emotions suitable for a poem and agrees when Pound states that this emotion is "very remote from the everyday emotion of sloppiness and sentiment."[8] A similar idea is expressed by Eliot in "The Perfect Critic" as he states that the true complete artist is capable of taking personal responses and combining them with "a multitude of other suggestions" which will produce "a new object . . . a work of art."[9]

As Oras notes, the personal experience of the poet is of value to Eliot only as it contributes to the "excellence" of the poet's work, not because it is a biographical fact or a personal event; the poet must view his experiences creatively as they contribute to his art.

Oras quotes Eliot--in regard to Paul Valery's work--as saying "not our feelings, but the pattern which we may make of our feelings, is the centre of value" (pp. 10-11). Matthiessen also comments that Eliot objects when he believes an artist tries to use art to show how individual he is, or to convey personal expressions (p. 146).

When Eliot writes his essay "Ben Jonson" in 1919, he observes that an author has several ways in which he could instill in his creations his emotions and personality without being offensive (SE, p. 137). Smith declares that Eliot's early poems, in which he uses personas as mediums of expression, indicate Eliot searching for the best vehicle for expression of emotions and thought (p. 5). Bateson offers a similar view of Eliot's persona technique (p. 634). In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot concludes that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (SE, p. 10).

Eliot also commented in his essays prior to The Waste Land on the prosody that would fit the poetry he envisions. Probably the best-known of technical concepts would be Eliot's "objective correlative," an idea that would enable the poet to be quite invisible in his work. The term "objective correlative" was first used by Washington Allston, and hints of other possible sources of the term could be Edmund Hussert or Nietzsche.

DeLauria goes on to say that as late as 1947 Eliot claimed the term to be original with him (pp. 426-29). Frank suggests Bradley influenced Eliot here, as well, because he had discussed objectifying "inarticulate states of feeling" (p. 316). Eliot's use of the term occurs in his 1919 essay "Hamlet and His Problems" as he discusses the problem of justifiable emotions in the play. He concludes that

> the only way of expressing emotion in the formal art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (SE, p. 124-25)

Oras sees the objective correlative serving as an ordering principle to Eliot, something to objectify the "incoherent impulses" of the poet's "inner chaos" (p. 74), which is only another statement that the objective correlative serves the poet by allowing him to transmit personal experiences into more universal ones, thus assisting the poet's reach beyond the personal. Whatever the objective equivalent of emotions, feelings, and thoughts the poet chooses, certainly it is a careful, deliberate selection. As Smith notes, Eliot expected a definite response to his use in the 1920's of the images of city squalor and bleakness--these were not accidental choices

(p. 2). In the case of Eliot's earliest poetry in which he had certain personas, Matthiessen suggests that Eliot's choice of Prufrock--a character so apparently different from Eliot, the man--enables him not to become enmeshed in personal remembrances, but to really devote his attention to the poem, where his responsibility lies (p. 59). Matthiessen also points out that in using a definite object (image or character) Eliot did not really limit the poem's range, because the "indefinite associations" of the object as well as the concrete ones also reveal themselves to enrich the meaning of the work (p. 116).

Another element of prosody, linked with the objective correlative that Eliot often discussed even in his early essays, was the theory of the words to be used by the poet. In his essay "Blake" Eliot decides that Blake wrote like any other poet--he began with an "idea (a feeling, an image), he develops it by accretion or expansion, alters his verse often, and hesitates over the final choice." The poet manipulates words and ideas to create poetry, and Eliot even goes so far as to say that if words come too easily to the poet, he should be suspicious that they are from a "shallower source" than deep in intelligence and soul (SE, p. 277). In "Ezra Pound" (in 1917) Eliot discusses this difficulty of words--they "are perhaps the hardest of all material for art for they must be used to express both visual beauty and beauty of sound,

as well as communicating a grammatical statement" (p. 171). The bad poet to Eliot is one who can not bring together words and objects, but in "Swinburne as Poet" Eliot looks with excitement upon a language which "is struggling to digest and express new objects, new groups of objects, new feelings, new aspects" (SE, p. 285). These new, unexpected relations of words Eliot views as the result of great sensibilities at work when "sensation became word and word was sensation" (SE, p. 185).

Eliot in "The Perfect Critic" regrets that words had lost their definiteness. In this essay Eliot goes on to define the sense of abstraction a word may have. A word may be "abstract" by having a "meaning which cannot be grasped by appeal to any of the senses;" Eliot uses the word activity as an example of this. Or, abstraction results when a word's "apprehension may require a deliberate suppression of analogies of visual or muscular experiences" (SE, pp. 8-10).

In "Ben Jonson," Eliot discusses poets whose words have "often a network of tentacular roots reaching down to the deepest terrors and desires" (SE, p. 135). Of course, the deeper the words can reach, the more significant the poetry, because as the words become more refined, the more able they are to express the subtle, intricate emotions (SW, p. 87). In the essay "Swinburne as Poet" Eliot faults Swinburne for using the general instead of

the specific word; this results in lines that are not "focused" and the general words can only emphasize general emotions (SE, p. 283).

Matthiessen notes that Eliot believed the poet must have a sense of the "thrust" of language--he must recognize that words are for exploration of the human condition (p. 86). Helen Gardner in The Art of T.S. Eliot summarizes Eliot's concern for words when she states that, from the first, as a poet he had a keen sense of diction and a recognition of its "varied resources" in the use both of the "exotic" and "commonplace" word--although in his earlier poetry, Eliot refrained from using words considered "poetic"; only later would he have the mastery to use what he considered the "obvious" choice.[10]

In conjunction with the meanings of words chosen, their arrangement and musicality were especially important to Eliot during these early years. Several essays comment upon the need for a controlled technique. As Eliot noted in "Tradition and Individual Talent," much of poetic composition results from careful planning and work by the poet (SE, p. 10), and he points out in "Phillip Massinger" that the resulting style of the poet should be evaluated by its capability of great variety of expression, not on the basis of being simple or involved (SE, p. 187). Eliot commented on the contributions to poetry of various writers, often noting how well chosen the technique was. For

example, in "The Blank Verse of Marlowe," Eliot insists that Marlowe accomplished two goals in prosody--he incorporated the melody of Spenser and he reinforced "the sentence period against the line period"; these changes moved English verse beyond the rhymed couplet and brief pastoral form (SW, p. 91). Eliot in "Reflections on Vers Libre" gave his position toward form quite clearly. This essay, originally appearing on March 3, 1917 in the New Statesman and reprinted in To Criticize the Critic, begins with Eliot's statement that "vers libre" does not really exist; the theory of it is fiction. According to Eliot, this apparent change occurs in verse as one theory supposedly revolutionizes the art world when

> an artist happens upon a method . . . which is new in the sense that it is essentially different from that of the second-rate people about him, and different in everything but essentials from that of any of his great predecessors. (CC, pp. 183-84)

Eliot admits some "innovations" may occur, but vers libre is not a genuine form because it lacks a "positive definition"--it can only be defined by negative aspects such as "absence of pattern," "absence of rhyme," "absence of metre." He concludes by stating that no dichotomy really exists between "conservative verse and vers libre . . . for there is only good verse, bad verse, and chaos" (SW, pp. 184, 189).

Considering the metre and scansion of lines, Eliot notes that any line can be broken down into some pattern. However, he says that no reason exists why "within the single line, there should be any repetition; why there should not be lines (as there are) divisible only into feet of different types." Also, Eliot states in this essay that "scansion tells us very little. It is probable that there is not much to be gained by an elaborate system of prosody," and even if the poet employs a really complex prosody, once the reader picks up the pattern, the effect will generally be weakened. In addition the skill required in the writing of complex lines is not as important as the ability "to take liberties" with the standard forms after a mastering of them. Eliot continues:

> the most interesting verse which has yet been written in our language has been done either by taking a very simple form, like the iambic pentameter, and constantly withdrawing from it, or taking no form at all, and constantly approximating to a very simple one. It is this contrast between fixity and flux, this unperceived evasion of monotony which is the very life of verse.

Eliot notes that a hint of form should be in all verse because "freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against a background of artificial limitation. . . . and not to have perceived . . . that some artificial limitation is necessary except in moments of the first intensity is . . . a capital error" (CC, pp. 185-87).

When the poet rejects rhyme, it results in even greater demands on the language because then the diction and the syntax of the lines are more readily noticed. Of course, this may mean that the musicality of certain words can be better employed, and this "liberation from rhyme" is perhaps a true liberation of it because once poets stop using rhyme to strengthen weak verse, this will enable the poet to use rhyme where it can be most effective, to achieve "some special effect, for a sudden tightening up, for a cumulative instance, or for an abrupt change of mood." However, Eliot insists that rhymed verse will always have a place in literature, and he believes that only in a "homogeneous" society, which would allow many poets to work on the same problems, can new forms be really perfected. He concludes his essay by noting that "there is no escape from metre; there is only mastery" (CC, pp. 188-89). Eight months later in his essay "Ezra Pound: His Metre and Poetry" Eliot suggests that the apparent freeness of Pound's verse actually results from the tension created by the "constant opposition between free and strict," and by attention to metre, and he repeats his earlier conclusion that two verse forms--free and strict--do not exist, but only mastery (CC, p. 172). Oras points out that conventions in technique help the poet by allowing fuller concentration on the poem and prevention of wasted efforts, and he compares these to a ballet movement--the

movement exists, but each dancer must vitalize it (pp. 41-42). Matthiessen comments that if part of the vitalizing effort resulted in a new rhythm or new form, then to Eliot this was not just a new technique in poetry, but also a development in sensibility, a finding of the right vehicle for the new thoughts and emotions (pp. 82, 88). Kenner agrees; he states that the "quality of the rhythm indicates something of the quality of the emotion" because a poem's emotion is linked so closely to its rhythm (p. 173).

Finally, Eliot comments on one other facet of this early concept of poetry--the role of philosophy or belief. On this one point, Eliot's attitude changed somewhat, but even in these early essays, Eliot dealt with the problem of handling the ideas; this indicates how aware Eliot was of the range a theory must have, and certainly invalidates the claims that he was interested only in technique.

In the earliest essays Eliot gave only two statements about the role of the idea in the poem, and these came as a judgment against William Blake. Eliot faulted Blake as a poet because he saw his philosophy as more important than his art, which resulted in a "formlessness" in the poetry. In an attempt to mitigate the blame, Eliot does note that Blake lacked an adequate "framework" of accepted and traditional ideas on which to build his poetry. If Blake had had such a frame, Eliot believes, this would

have saved Blake from attempts to develop his own philosophy; thus he would have kept the focus on his poetry (SE, pp. 278-80).

Oras suggests Eliot also liked the use of more accepted views because these are shared by many and can create greater intensity (p. 29); the critic sees flaws in this approach because such a restriction on original thought might restrict the poet's emotional and ideational development, (p. 364), but Eliot believed at this time that idea was subordinate to art.

On the other hand, Eliot views part of Dante's success as a result of his writing in a period that provided such a philosophical and theological framework. Dante did not have to concern himself with the assent of the reader to the ideas. In the first essay on Dante, which appeared in The Sacred Wood, Eliot comments that the philosophy in The Divine Comedy is essential to the poem, but not for its value as a system of thought and belief. Rather, its value lies in its role as part of the overall structure of the poem. Eliot draws a line between the speculative philosopher and the poet who wants to "realize" ideas, but the poetry can still have a philosophy (SW, pp. 160-63). However, Dante does not ask his reader to study the philosophy but to recognize its role in the world view which the poem reflects (SW, p. 170). Of course, as Lu suggests, the more fully the reader

comprehends and sympathizes with the philosophy, perhaps the more fully the reader will appreciate the work (p. 34) --a view Eliot will discuss in later essays.

As a result of the essays prior to 1921, what, then, can be determined to form the basis of Eliot's poetic theory? The acceptable poetry must reflect the poet's recognition of tradition (in the full sense of the word); it must serve as an unification of the tho ght and feelings; it must be impersonal; it must use a diction and syntax which reflect and incorporate a great range of new and subtle emotions by rhythmical qualities; it must not sacrifice aesthetic value for a creed; it must reflect mastery of technique.

These same concepts will be found in those essays that follow the publication of The Waste Land in 1921. What Eliot first verbalized--often indirectly and by suggestions--in random critiques of other poets in those early years before he attained a really solid reputation as a poet will be developed and repeated in the years between 1921 and 1930.

Chapter II

Theory of The Waste Land Years: 1921-1930

In 1921 Eliot, according to Kirk, gave to Ezra Pound a long poem. Those parts which survived Pound's editing were published in October, 1922 in The Criterion, and in December of that year the American edition appeared (pp. 77-78). The poem, hailed by most literary critics as a new form and an expression of the thoughts and sentiments of the post-war individuals, marked a period for Eliot in which he would come to a clearer statement and amplification of his earlier views on poetry and, at the end of this era, he would have a definite position toward poetry, and life, from which he would not depart. Although the bulk of Eliot's essays outlining his poetic theory would not be written until another decade had passed, Eliot's essays of this period indicate that he continues to believe poetry must follow certain standards, and according to Oras the poet's role, as Eliot expresses it in the "Preface" to the poems of Ezra Pound, continued to be the "accumulation of experience," and the practicising and perfecting of his technique in order that when those moments of poetic creation (the "unpredictable crystallization") occur, the artist is ready (pp. 12-13).

Matthiessen notes that in this preface Eliot also said the poet's work might be viewed as an "imaginary graph" with one line representing his efforts as a poet to develop his form and the other representing his course as a human being with all of his experiences, interests, and emotions (p. 133). Hopefully, these lines will converge, and the result will be a new work of art.

The function, or value, of the resulting art remains difficult to verbalize. Eliot, in this period, attempts to go beyond his "amusement" quality for art. Oras quotes Eliot in 1929 as saying that as long as poetry is written, "its first purpose must always be what it has been--to give a peculiar pleasure which has something constant in it throughout the ages, however difficult and various our explanations of that pleasure may be" (p. 7). Kirk comments that Eliot allowed critics various interpretations of his works because he believed that a writer might express what were "dim truths" to himself, yet clear ones to another (p. 57), so Eliot believed that art had some value as expression of truth. In 1923, in "The Function of Criticism" Eliot noted that art may not always have a clear view of the purposes to which it will be put later--as opposed to criticism, which should have definite goals (SE, p. 13). But there remains standards to be met if it is adequately to fill its purpose.

Schneider comments that between 1928 and 1930 Eliot's thought tended to become concrete (p. 151); yet there is

no abrupt change from the previous decades. For example, the emphasis on tradition continued, with the view that timelessness and time can and do coexist. In his major essay on Dante in 1929, Eliot states that "the experience of a poem is the experience both of a moment and a lifetime" (SE, p. 212); the immediate experience modifies the reader; thus it remains an influence for life. Eliot in 1923 ("Function of Criticism") reiterates his belief that the new in art alters the old order, and that the artist owes allegiance to something outside of himself; artists are united by an inheritance that is tradition (SE, pp. 12-13). Critics view The Waste Land as the representation of such a belief. Gardner comments that, although The Waste Land superficially reveals modern problems, actually it relates all of history's problems (p. 88). Schneider concludes also that by writing The Waste Land, Eliot "is making himself responsible for the continued or revived life of past values" (p. 64).

Matthiessen suggests that Eliot by the late 1920's had decided that those whose poetry remains personally important are those who have gotten to the "essence" of the struggle of good and evil--poets such as Dante and Baudelaire (p. 21). Such an attitude reflects great interest in the past. Matthiessen also notes that Eliot so often used reminiscence in his poetry because this method allows suggestions of "the extensive consciousness

of the past that is mentally possessed by any cultivated reader," and it also allows a "tacit revelation of the sameness between the life of the present and that of other ages" (pp. 35-36). Kenner offers a similar view in his evaluation that Eliot believed poetry concerns itself with the "aspects . . . which transcend the dimension of time, though of necessity experienced in time" (p. 165).

In 1921, Eliot commented in his essay "Dryden" that assimilation is important for the poet (SE, p. 271), and a similar thought runs through his "Metaphysical Poets" essay as he credits this group with the power to assimilate, to unify; the poet could bring order to the disorder (SE, p. 247). Lu comments that Eliot viewed the metaphysical poets as unifying thought and emotion (p. 42).[1] In the 1927 essay "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," Eliot says that when we differentiate poets by those who do and do not think, we are not talking about the ideas these poets offer--they do not lack quality of thought, but of emotion. He continues this argument, saying "the poet who 'thinks' is merely the poet who can express the emotional equivalent of thought." Again, Eliot stresses the importance of unifying thought and feelings, and he goes so far as to state that "every precise emotion tends toward intellectual formulation" (SE, p. 115).

Another type of unity is mentioned by Kirk, the coming together of the correct form and impulse and

thought. He quotes Eliot's commentary in The Criterion in April, 1924 in which Eliot defined the "classical moment" in literary history as "a moment of stasis, when the creative impulse finds a form which satisfies the best intellect of the time, a moment when a type is produced" (p. 117). Matthiessen also discusses this moment of blending; after the poet accumulates thought, impressions, and feelings for possibly several years, Eliot believes that the poem which might result from assimilation is not a momentary experience but "the blending into a concentrated unity of the dominant thoughts and feelings of several years," according to Matthiessen (pp. 141-42), and these thoughts and ideas may have come to the poet, Eliot points out, with a sensuous quality--not an intellectual perception alone (p. 14). Finally, on the topic of unifying thoughts and emotions and experiences, Gardner indicates that after The Waste Land Eliot's poetry reflects his attempts to bring together and understand his entire range of experiences, and his later poetry reflects this assimilating (p. 185).

During this period, Eliot still held that transforming the personal into the impersonal was vital. Even though The Waste Land may have been an expression of Eliot's thoughts during 1921, the poem clearly is more than a personal wailing. Kirk credits the poem with having discerned and described the "common disorders of the soul

of the twentieth century" (p. 74). Eliot was following his own dictate; this poem spoke for all. Schneider comments that by 1929 Eliot was definitely convinced that the "poet's own personality and private experience may show through the transparency of the verbal surface"; this she insists is nearly a "full retraction" of his earlier position (pp. 2-3). However, Eliot did not say that the private experience should overwhelm the verbal surface. In the essay on Dante, in 1929, Eliot praises Dante for his universality and gives explanations for it. But one point about Dante remains--his was not a poetry limited to Dante; it could be comprehended by all men of sensibility in Western civilization. True, the poet begins with his own emotions, and poets of different eras may not vary greatly in these, but in 1927, in "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" Eliot reaffirms his position when he declares that Shakespeare "was occupied with the struggle--which alone constitutes life for a poet--to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal" (SE, p. 117). Whatever may have been the stimulus for these agonies is not particularly important; what the poet does with them is, because Eliot says that in the transforming of the emotions, "the great poet, in writing himself, writes his time" (SE, p. 117). A time is not written because one man felt something, but because he verbalized what all

men were feeling. Also, during this period Eliot starts to lose some of his attachment for the metaphysicals because he states in his 1921 essay "The Metaphysical Poets" that while those who wrote in this vein may have impersonalized their language, the feelings remained personal. Here Eliot believes the sentimental group, which wanted to express self instead of emphasizing order and reason, started. Eliot emphasizes that the more varied the interests of the poet the better, but he must take these and change them into poetry. To simply "meditate on them poetically" is not enough (SE, pp. 247-48). In 1924, Eliot again avows that "abstraction from actual life" is a prerequisite for creation of art form, in "Four Elizabethan Dramatists" (SE, p. 93). Matthiessen makes several observations about the concept of impersonality. He notes that the experience in literature does not have to be personal--the poet can assimilate material from others. The poet's imagination plays an important role in this process, Matthiessen notes (p. 45). Also, Matthiessen, in response to Eliot's discussion of elevating pain beyond personal experience, states that the artist may indeed portray the belief that life has tragedy, but he must not do so in tones of "adolescent self-pitying" (p. 107).

The prosody available to the poet also drew attention from Eliot during these years. Unger indicated that in an interview, Eliot remarked that in his earliest poetry he

had more to say than he could manage because he lacked the needed skill to manipulate language; therefore, obscurity resulted (p. 41). Schneider also indicates Eliot's recognition that the poet must style the language --even if, like Eliot, he wanted the speech of conversation--to suit his poetry (p. 94). Eliot defined style in poetry as the "vocabulary, syntax, and order of thought" (SE, p. 21). This development in language remains important to Eliot because he believes no great poet can write in what is conceived as "poetic" language. Matthiessen indicates that Eliot hoped to achieve in his verse the rhythm of thoughts (p. 16). Music and rhythm were important, yet Eliot cautions, Schneider indicates, that they can not be separated from the meaning of the poem; one should support the other. She continues by noting Eliot's realization that if the poet tries to use rhythm alone for meaning, the resulting "unsatisfied intellect" will quickly dissipate whatever "aesthetic pleasure" the music creates (p. 100). Concerning the words to be used in poetry, Eliot had several suggestions. Again, the essay "Dante" provides illumination. Eliot theorizes that words in English poetry often have

> a kind of opacity which is part of their beauty. I do not mean that the beauty of English poetry is what is called mere 'verbal beauty.' It is rather that words have associations . . . because they are the growth of a particular civilization. (SE, p. 201)

As Matthiessen quotes Eliot from The Tyro in 1922, he firmly believes the poet should be aware of the history of the words employed, because "the essential of tradition is this: in getting as much as possible of the whole weight of the history of the language behind his word" (p. 83). Every word used had value to Eliot, including, Matthiessen believes, the epigraphs he attached to his poems (p. 53). Indeed, Eliot in 1928 defined poetry in the "preface" to the second edition of The Sacred Wood as "excellent words in excellent arrangement and excellent metre" (p. ix).

The words that convey the essence of the poem create images, but even with these Eliot cautions in "Dryden" to be wary that they be neither all suggestion and no meaning nor all meaning and no suggestion (SE, p. 273). Certain techniques may be employed by the poet to create proper images. For example, the concept of allegory is mentioned in "Dante," and Eliot indicates that it can be a suitable device, because the allegorical meanings would not have to be understood by the reader to grasp the meaning of the poem (SE, p. 219). Eliot was often criticized for his extensive use of allusions. Readers levied the charge that Eliot was doing this to display his knowledge or to be deliberately obscure or to send the reader on a chase to decipher the allusions. Since Eliot had stated that the best words are those that

give definite impressions, his use of allusions could be considered at variance with his theory. However, I.A. Richards in Principles of Literary Criticism defends Eliot's use of allusions as a "technical device for compression," reducing poetry to the "bare bones" Eliot was to advocate.[2]

Word choice may also result in surprise or a sense of contrast for the reader, as Eliot indicates in "Andrew Marvel" (SE, p. 254). Eliot also defends the use of unusual images in his comments on Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal, Matthiessen observes, because Eliot praises Baudelaire's ability to use the images of a modern, sordid city with a resulting "elevation of such imagery to the first intensity--presenting it as it is, and yet making it represent something much more than itself" (p. 18). Whatever the word chosen, it still must appear uncontrived, and rhythmical, with as full a range of suggestiveness as the author can find.

In October of 1927, Eliot printed in The Criterion an essay entitled "Mr. Middleton Murry's Synthesis"; in this, Eliot again commits himself to the position that poetry should not be viewed as a substitute for religion or philosophy. He also reaffirms the necessity of a permanent order for a culture, and this poetry could not create.[3] In "Shakespeare and Stoicism of Seneca," of the same year, Eliot repeats that poetry is not a religion

with a creed and dogma; he views its function as emotional. In this, he goes so far as to speculate on whether the question of belief enters into the role of the poet; perhaps the poet only uses thought systems for his own purposes, joining emotion to the thought (SE, p. 118). Eliot notes here that critics have never really determined what Shakespeare's beliefs were--he may well have held views other than those presented in his work. Eliot says often people extract things of "cosmic significance" from his own work that he did not know was there; it would be interesting to see how Eliot viewed such "revelations" (SE p. 108). In the other major essay of this era, "Dante," Eliot discusses at length the role of belief in poetry. He begins by noting that Dante owed a philosophical debt to his time because an acceptable "framework" of belief existed. However, Eliot continues, although the reader can not overlook Dante's philosophy it is not essential to agree with it in order to appreciate the poem. Eliot stresses that a difference exists between "philosophic belief and poetic assent," and since the poem must be viewed in its entirety, the philosophy expressed must be considered (SE, pp. 218-19). Eliot also suggests--as he had with Shakespeare--that whatever Dante the man believed, his poetry is the object of consideration. While the poetry may have stemmed from a personal belief, it goes beyond a plea for the reader's assent to the creed.

Eliot emphasizes the reader's responsibility to understand the world view expressed in the poetry as fully as possible, but not to evaluate the worth of the poetry by agreement or disagreement with that view (SE, p. 219). In an explanatory note attached to this essay, Eliot compares his attitude with that of I.A. Richards and concludes that they agree in the premise that poetry can be appreciated by a reader who does not subscribe to the belief expressed. Eliot says to take the position that belief is a prerequisite to poetry would be to negate the existence of poetry. However, Eliot does admit that a link exists between appreciation of the poetry and assent to its philosophy (SE, pp. 229-30). So again Eliot admits that poetry will express a view or attitude, just as he had admitted in 1928 that poetry did have something to do with morals, an admission which Edmund Wilson in Axel's Castle viewed as an expansion of Eliot's concept of poetry. Wilson commented that it would be interesting to see where Eliot would go with this attitude because Wilson was convinced he would not stagnate in another wasteland.[4] Such a position as Eliot's would force extension of the concept into action. One other comment from this essay deserves attention. Eliot concedes that, from Dante, one can learn that a philosophical expression can equal great poetry, and religious thoughts can serve for the subject of major poetry (SE, p. 214). Within a year, Eliot will be proving the validity of his theory.

Oras suggests that Eliot believed that the "value of abstract thought for poetry is dependent on the extent to which the thought stirs the poet's emotional and creative impulse," and he also notes that Eliot considered the accepted ideas of a culture the best for inclusion in poetry (pp. 23-24). Smith certainly believes that Eliot's personal point of view came to be more incorporated into the poetry (p. 6), but Eliot would not object to this, as long as no accusation is made that the attention to the philosophy detracted from the art. Richards states that Eliot uses an intellectual thread for a "scaffolding" purpose, a form on which to build his art; and the ideas Eliot employs are to be "responded to" rather than "worked out" (p. 290-293). Gardner, expressing a similar idea, notes that Eliot's attitude toward poetry emphasizes the overall work, not the philosophy alone (p. 185).

At the close of the 1920's, a period noted for a sense of futility and bleakness, so well portrayed at the beginning of the decade in The Waste Land, Eliot still emphasized those primary ideas he had expressed in his earliest essays. He retained the beliefs that poetry had a function in society, necessitating an art incorporating tradition and universality. Poetry must recognize the past, yet be modern; it must stem from personal thoughts and feelings, yet transcend their limits; it must, of necessity, embody a philosophy or point of view, yet not

sacrifice art for idea. When in 1929 Eliot declared his own poetic theory "embryonic," (SE, p. 229) it was a well chosen adjective, for just as an embryo develops according to its genetic code, with radical external pressures required to alter it, so Eliot's theory grew. The major essays in which he discussed his theory would cover another three decades, yet no surprises awaited the Eliot reader, because the ideas did not change, nor did the overall quality of the essays in which they were expressed.

Chapter III

In 1930, Eliot published "Ash Wednesday." As speculated by Wilson two years before, Eliot indeed had not reached his stasis with The Waste Land; he had only recognized his point of departure. Matthiessen points out that a maturing Eliot came to the conclusion that one either accepts denial and skepticism or faith (p. 100). Eliot chose the latter. In "Ash Wednesday" Eliot portrayed the emptiness, the seeking, the religious impulse that modern man experienced. The poem clearly reflected that Eliot had come to rest in the orthodoxy of Christianity, a move which did not basically alter Eliot's concept of poetry, with the exception of his attitude toward the role belief could play in the poet's task. Eliot often remarked that the state of culture could influence the poetry of an age, but this should not be used by the poet as an excuse for inferior verse. Indeed, in "Matthew Arnold" (in The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism) Eliot avowed that "The essential advantage for a poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal: it is to be able to

see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the havoc, and the glory."[1] Eliot's poetry of this period would do this, remaining true to his earlier dictates of form and function while dealing with the moral problems, which Eliot viewed as a heavier burden now, according to Kirk (p. 18). Eliot also comments in "Conclusions," 1933, that ultimate theories about poetry belong in the aesthetic realm, and the poet can only speculate; however, he hastens to add that if such speculations are not "guided by sound theology," they become dangerous (UP, pp. 45-50). Eliot did attempt to explain the origin of the poem in his essays of this period by suggesting that a poem is the "attempt of somebody to say something"; in his essay "The Music of Poetry" in 1953, Eliot claims that the first responsibility of the poet is to express himself--to him the poem is "the right outcome of the process that has taken place," and the creation may well be an escape--the poet trying to get away, to be released from a burden, to "gain relief from acute discomfort." The origin of a poem resulting from this, Eliot maintains, can be no more clearly defined (PP, pp. 108-09). But Eliot does not believe poetry originates only to offer release, or to communicate ideas or to improve society; neither is the genesis "a vision but an emotion terminating in an arrangement of words on paper." He concludes that the origin of poetry can perhaps

only be defined as "a savage beating on a drum in a jungle," delighting in the resulting expressive rhythm; the origin, does not greatly concern Eliot, only the result (UP, pp. 139-46, 155).

Once the result is realized, what, then, did Eliot as a mature poet determine its role to be? Much disagreement exists among critics. Eliot in 1932 said such a question was ridiculous on one hand; the use of music is not debated. But, aside from the many uses assigned poetry, Eliot feels that the function remains "to give pleasure, to entertain or divert people" (UP, p. 31). But while retaining the pleasure principle in poetry, in 1945 in "The Social Function of Poetry," Eliot comments that poetry is also to communicate a "new experience, or some fresh understanding of the familiar or the expression of something we have experienced but have no words for."[2] If both criteria are not met, Eliot does not believe the work is poetry. He enlarges his view of function in several essays written during this period. In "Literature and the Modern World" he comments that poetry has a social function--the poet "must assume the role of moralist," but commitment to society is not the primary focus of the poet.[3]

The primary function of poetry remains, he commented in the "Social Function of Poetry," to "preserve" and to "extend and improve" the language. Poetry must express what others feel, and it moves the individual to a fuller

comprehension of existence; thus poetry refines the sensibility of a people. Eliot contends that even if all members of society did not know or read important poetry, the significance of the work remained, even though its influence would be far too difficult to follow; the diffusion occurs on many levels in the culture and eventually will affect all. (In an interview with Leslie Paul, "A Conversation with T.S. Eliot," in 1958 Eliot, speculating about the gulf between the artist and his audience, suggests that perhaps the audience chose not to follow the poet, then blamed the poet's "obscurity," instead of their own lack of interest.)[34] Eliot argues that if a culture does not have great writers, "our ability, not merely to express, but even to feel any but the crudest emotions, will degenerate" (PP, pp. 9-12). Then, in Eliot's view, poetry serves a high and noble purpose by the expression of particular feelings and thoughts, because the poetry serves not only as a record of the moment, and preservation of the past, but more importantly it can cause the reader to become better attuned to these moments of first intensity. By refining the sensibilities, poetry serves to make us more human. As an example, Eliot noted in "Poetry and Drama" that art should "impose" and then make the reader aware of its "credible order" in life. Once this has been done, we have been brought to "a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation"

(PP, pp. 93-94). This is the moment of the "highest point of consciousness" to which poetry elevates language (UP, p. 15); this is the zenith of communication, and to this goal the poet should aspire, always conscious that to prostitute the poetry for dogma accomplishes nothing except poor verse. The ultimate function of the artist remains to serve "his art with his entire integrity," and thus he serves mankind (PP, p. 30). Eliot concludes that such service ultimately defines the function of poetry--not its origins or its uses.

Kirk notes that Eliot maintained he had written The Family Reunion as an attempt "to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives . . . not to transport the audience" to an imaginative world (p. 267). Freed notes that Eliot's theory of the use of poetry can be applied to many levels, but the principle remains that poetry should give both aesthetic pleasure and an "intuition of transcendental reality" (p. 174).

To do these things, Schneider sees Eliot shifting from a broad emphasis on tradition and language to spiritual matters (p. 184), but Eliot did not neglect tradition in his final theory. (Actually, how could a revival of orthodox, Anglican Christianity ever be far removed from a belief in tradition?) Eliot emphasized in "Wordsworth and Coleridge" that all "human affairs" interact, and poetry will reflect this (UP, p. 76). He

expressed a similar thought in "Religion and Literature" in 1936: the broader the exposure to the past and present, the more the mind becomes evaluative, looking for relationships (SE, pp. 348-50). He continued to stress that a good poet must study the past masters of his craft (PP, p. 11), and that without a knowledge of tradition, the individual will be more easily caught up in the momentary; so tradition does preserve poetry (CC, p. 151). Not only was the affirmation of "the eternal against the transient" important, but Eliot expanded his view until he concluded in "Literature and the Modern World" that literature should "try to bring about a future in which the obstacles to this realization (of external truths) will be less, for the mass of humanity than they are today" (America Through the Essay, p. 380). Any new mode of writing which appears should be viewed not as necessarily an increased awareness of truth, Eliot argued in "American Literature and Language" (CC, p. 57). A similar point was made in Paul's interview when Eliot credited part of the poetic skill not to any feeling of prophesying, but to a definite absorption and assimilation of culture (pp. 14-15). Kirk believes that Eliot's self-label of classicist stems from his view of tradition, and its implicit meaning of absorption (p. 146). Of course Eliot, Kirk emphasizes, believed this should result from intelligent probing by the individual, realizing that change is part of tradition

(p. 212). Gardner believes today's poet faces a greater difficulty because no definite culture or tradition exists that he may use as a basis; even in the area of religious thought, the poet may not safely assume his readers will be familiar with the ideas (pp. 62, 69-70). Certainly Eliot realized the diminishment of such a framework, and this knowledge fueled his efforts to incorporate such ideas into poetry. In 1944 in "What is a Classic?" Eliot discussed the danger of provincialism in the contemporary attitude toward time. He was alarmed by the view that if something belonged to the past, it was of no real value today (PP, p. 72).

This persistent emphasis on the balancing of past and present demonstrates that Eliot continued to stress important unifying principle. In the essay on classics, Eliot states that the poetry which reflects the tension between the traditional past and the view of the present and the hope for the future supercedes that which has only a sense of one time. The mature poet ponders all three dimensions and the resulting unity defines his poetry as major (PP, pp. 54-58). Eliot also argues in "John Ford" that there must be "one significant, consistent and developing personality" underlying a poet's work (SE, p. 179); without this, his works do not offer a unified whole, which Eliot had stressed as important in his earliest declarations on poetry. Schneider suggests that Eliot wished for his

work to be viewed as a whole (p. 5). He continued to be impressed by the goal of the metaphysical school to unify thought and sensation; indeed, Eliot believed states of unity were important on many levels, and the balancing required to produce these resulted in tensions that supported and defined much: the artist and society; thought and emotions; the personal and the impersonal; form and content. These polarities underlie much of Eliot's theory. As Matthiessen indicates, Eliot knew that poetry must cover a broad spectrum of human experience (p. 43) and indicate the basis, or order, on which it rests. Matthiessen continues by suggesting that merely reflective poetry loses the dramatic quality because it does not indicate unity of emotion and thought by "thinking in images" (p. 68). As Eliot had previously stated, feelings alone will not suffice--unification is essential. Eliot in his essay "Wordsworth and Coleridge" argues their importance rests on one thing--they exhibit "not merely a variety of interests, even of passionate interests; it is all one passion expressed through them all: poetry was for them the expression of a totality of unified interests" (UP, p. 81).

The classic piece of literature would exhibit this unity partially through its impersonality--the poet has taken personal feelings and elevated them to universality. Universal appeal does not mean the literary piece should be bland or lacking a sense of "localness." Eliot in

"American Literature and American Language," in 1953, stresses that a strong local flavor will probably be found in great literature (this local flavor exists because of the concreteness of the language, as Eliot suggests in "Goethe"; (SE, p. 251), but it will also have an impersonal truth (CC, pp. 54-56). This truth will be valuable to the history of man, Eliot vows in "Poetry and Propaganda,"[5] and it also serves as a partial definition of a classic (PP, p. 61). When Eliot attempted to define inspiration in his essay "Virgil and the Christian World" in 1951, he said a moment could be one of inspiration when "speaker or writer is uttering something which he does not wholly understand--or which he may even misinterpret when the inspiration has departed," (PP, p. 137).

Instead of clarifying poetic inspiration, Eliot here suggests that the writer himself becomes separate from his lines--they go beyond his personal barriers, and he expresses a similar thought in the "introduction" to The Use of Poetry when he declares that the poem exists independently of reader or writer; and "it has a reality which is not simply the reality of what the writer is trying to 'express,' or of his experience of writing it, or of the experience of the reader" (UP, p. 30). This type of existence Eliot believes Kipling gave to some of his works because he wrote "transparently, so that our attention is directed to the object and not to the medium"

(PP, p. 274). Eliot argues that even the supposedly very private poetry of love may appear to be addressed to one person, but in reality when the poet creates the poem, he intends that it "be overheard by other people" (PP, p. 97). Even in discussing Wordsworth and admitting that it would be difficult to exclude his ideas and theories and still have a full appreciation of his poetry, Eliot does not say this requiremen strengthens the individual poem (UP, pp. 87-88). As Kirk states, to Eliot the problem of modern writers remains "obsession with their own personal view of life" (p. 214).

Matthiessen suggests that Eliot, in the 1953 essay "Three Voices of Poetry," veers from his earlier impersonality concept when Eliot had stated the poem might serve as an "escape," yet in this essay Eliot contends that to believe the poet addresses only himself is "illusion," and the three voices he believes to be in poetry coexist; one does not exclude the other. Kenner points out that by the time of the later poems Eliot has become more confident of his ability to be impersonal; therefore in Four Quartets he does not use the personal technique (which Eliot had said was the third voice) of some of the earlier poem (p. 293).

Kirk explains most clearly why impersonality can exist as a poetic concept. Impersonality vitalizes a poem when the poet can

> relate one remarkable man's vision of time, self, reality and eternity to describe one person's experience of transcendence. Because there does exist a community of souls, it is possible for some other human beings to apprehend the poet's symbols of transcendence; and to draw analogies between these symbolic images and their own fleeting glimpses . . . of permanent things not knowable through the ordinary restricted operation of five senses. (p. 288)

It is just this aspect that Eliot believed should infuse a poem, lifting it above the personal.[6] Eliot had early criticised Yeats for attempting to use his poetry to promote a philosophical system--since it was of Yeats' own concoction, Eliot found it doubly hard to bear--but in later essays Eliot qualified his view of Yeats and impersonal artists when he explained:

> there are two forms of impersonality: That which is natural to the mere skillful craftsman and that which is achieved by the maturing artist. . . . The second impersonality is that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experiences is able to express a general truth, retaining all of the particularity (for concreteness) of his experience, to make of it a general symbol.

Eliot continued the essay "Yeats" by explaining that, because of this second definition, he could say Yeats' later poems were good because they were personal and not contradict himself (PP, p. 299). Mowbrey Allen offers a

most interesting assessment of impersonality, and he suggests in T.S. Eliot's Impersonal Theory of Poetry that Eliot viewed impersonality as the diametric opposite of indifference. Only great passion and intensity result in the impersonality desired by Eliot; lacking these, the artist can only be indifferent. Allen believes this analysis silences Eliot's critics, who attempt to equate impersonality with lack of strong emotion.[6] Such a valid impersonality Yeats reached, and Eliot expresses in Four Quartets.

To Eliot, the lines of poetry are not viewed as personal confessions, separating Yeats, or any poet, from others, but rather as a reflection of experiences similar to other men's; only the poet can capture them with "greater clarity, honesty and vigour" (PP, p. 302). Poetry, through "its resources of rhythm and sound, can articulate the concentrated essence of experience, and thus come closest to the universal and permanent" because it has such condensing strictness, as Matthiessen explains (p. 40).

Eliot devoted many lines of his later essays to discussing how to capture such experiences. He commented extensively on the concept of prosody for the poet, retaining his emphasis on the use of conversational English for poetry and, of course, the importance of imagery choice. Eliot in "What is a Classic?" comments that the style to which a poet should aspire would "make us exclaim,

not 'this is a man of genius using the language' but 'this realizes the genius of the language'" (PP, p. 64). Certainly Eliot believes that the language of poetry should be the language of the time. He had early faulted those who tried for a "poetical" tone by reverting to contrived, artificial language. Kenner points out that Eliot considered it necessary for the poet to use the language as he finds it--he can not go to another era because the emotional qualities may vary; the poet must be true to his own time (p. 341).

Eliot argues in "Johnson as Critic and Poet" that indeed, each era had "some standard of correct poetic diction" which would be similar to current speech. Because of this relationship with speech, the language correct for poetry will change as speech changes (PP, pp. 213-14). However, Eliot cautioned in "Milton II" in 1947 that poetry should also serve as a barrier against too rapid a change, especially if it were in the direction of either the speech of the street or jargon (PP, p. 182-83). This Eliot had mentioned when he proclaimed part of the function of poetry is to "purify" the language.

Gardner mentions the difficulties a modern poet faces with the technical, scientific and populist misuse of the language today. Eliot would agree, but would say the poet had no alternative but to use contemporary language. Gardener concludes that the poet's use of language determines

his greatness (pp. 407). Eliot gave his clearest statement of the poet's relationship with words in Four Quartets. In each of the four divisions, Eliot devotes portions of the fifth section to problems in communication. In "Burnt Norton," Eliot describes the difficulty:

> . . . Words strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
> Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
> Always assail them.[7]

In "East Coker," Eliot says that he has "only learnt to get the better of words," and he views attempts at communication as

> . . . a raid on the inarticulate
> with shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling.
> (CPP, p. 128)

And in "Little Gidding" the poet's goal is reached when he has mastered the language:

> . . . And every phrase
> And sentence that is right (where every
> word is at home,
> Taking its place to support the others,
> The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
> An easy commerce of the old and the new,
> The common word exact without vulgarity,
> The formal word precise but not pedantic,
> The complete consort dancing together)
> Every phrase and every sentence is an end
> and a beginning;
> Every poem an epitaph.

That the words should be representative of common speech Eliot emphasized often in the later essays. He noted in "Wordsworth and Coleridge" that the poet should not sound like a representative of any particular class in society but "rather better," although "when any class of society happens to have the best word . . . then the poet is entitled to it" (UP, p. 72). In "The Music of Poetry" he picked up this idea again, noting that whenever reforms occur in poetry, they generally serve to bring poetry back to common speech. He cautions that the poet should not confuse common speech with literal "street speech." Rather, he distinguishes between the two by reasoning that when one hears proper language for poetry, he would way "that's how I should talk if I could talk poetry" (PP, pp. 23-24). This language offers the best form for the expression of the feelings and thoughts that are the "personality of the people," and will serve for all levels of society (PP, p. 8).

D.W. Harding, in "T.S. Eliot--1925-1935," praises Eliot for coming close to perfecting different techniques in poetry that enable him to achieve subtlety, yet retain definiteness.[8] Certainly Eliot had hoped to achieve a form that would allow for this. Kenner believes his use of the four-beat line allows manipulation by Eliot to either "relax toward colloquial intimacy or contract in meditative deliberation" (p. 292). Gardner also believes this form exhibits "rhythmic flexibility," which Eliot considered important (p. 29). When questioned by Leslie Paul in "A

Conversation with T.S. Eliot" about proper verse forms, Eliot responded that possibly the standard for English verse is iambic pentameter, and perhaps the artist should --when the form loses freshness--take verse away from this norm so that it could return revitalized, rid of older, rigid rules for use (p. 20). In his discussion of "In Memoriam," he admits that by extreme digression from accepted metric form, the artist may be f· eing the verse to come to a rightful position (SE, p. 267). Gardner states that once a really great artist exhausts his own form, no one can follow him without either imitating or really getting away from the depleted method (p. 23). As Eliot declared in "Music of Poetry," several types of patternings which can be suitable are available for poetry, and when the artist finds one that satisfies his requirements, he may use it until it becomes too rigid (PP, p. 30). He also decides that rhyme in poetry can indeed be defended; blank verse does not necessarily better express "conversational" tone (PP, p. 200). Whatever the form chosen, Eliot repeats that free verse does not exist; he notes that he made that point twenty-five years earlier (PP, p. 30).

Eliot also comments more fully about the proper use of images in poetry during this period. His concept of the objective correlative remained, and he vows in "Milton II" that "the imagery of poetry should be extended

to topics and objects related to the life of a modern man or woman; that we were to seek the non-poetic, to seek even material refractory to transmutation into poetry" (PP, p. 182). He also suggests in "Kipling" that perhaps modern poems are considered more obscure because their subjects are more difficult, more immune to being dealt with in concrete form (PP, p. 293). But this difficulty did not excuse the poetry. As Matthiessen says, Eliot believed that while the suggestiveness of poetry should not diminish, the poet must continue to "centre on the specific and distinct," and that too often in literature suggestiveness really was offered as an excuse for vagueness, which Eliot did not approve of unless it had a "solid core" of thought and meaning behind it (p. 64).

Eliot always insisted that the images have a definite, particular sense, which he did not believe would diminish impersonality or abstract ideas.

Another important development during this period is the concept of the auditory imagination. Although Eliot had stressed in earlier essays the importance of rhythm and sound as well as the sense of words, he did not label this concern until the essay "Matthew Arnold" in 1933. Having criticized Arnold for lacking perception in the musical qualities of verse, Eliot emphasizes how vitally this can affect poetry. He defines the auditory imagination as

> the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word, sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and uses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality." (UP, pp. 118-19)

Essentially, those words so desired by the poet in "Little Gidding" have taken on the dimension of musicality, and this results in the language of poetry, something beyond mere words. Matthiessen believes that the concept of auditory imagination serves as a partial explanation of Eliot's stated goal of writing "poetry standing naked in its bare bones . . . so transparent we should not see the poetry but . . . what the poem points at"; he espresses the goal of getting "beyond poetry" (p. 90). He would so master the language with its meanings and rhythms and structures that, like any artistic tool handled brilliantly, it would become invisible to all but the most discerning eye, for the viewer does not speculate about the marble of the David, nor does the listener analyze the piano used for Chopin's music.

Eliot continues to insist in essays such as "The Music of Poetry" that the language of poetry must remain close to speech, and should not be considered as sound and

sense but as a combining of these two elements (PP, p. 21-23). If poetry tries to ignore one, the other will certainly suffer. In "Johnson as Critic and Poet," Eliot remarks that much poetry is good in one of the two areas, but great poetry must have both, although Eliot is willing to admit that either music or meaning may be the goal of a poet, but he must be careful to remain conscious of this imbalance (p. 193). Eliot deals with this again in "From Poe to Valery," and he concludes that

> poetry . . . may be said to range from that in which the attention of the reader is directed primarily to the sound, to that in which it is directed primarily to the sense, with the former kind, the sense may be apprehended almost unconsciously; with the latter kind--at these two extremes-- it is the sound, of the operation of which upon us we are unconscious. But with either type, sound and sense must cooperate; in even the most purely incantatory poem, the dictionary meaning of words cannot be disregarded with impunity. (CC, p. 32)

As the poet develops his language, he must then remain alert to the demands of speech and of music (PP, p. 33). Meeting both requirements would result in a refining of the language, polishing and compressing it to the the extent of the poet's power. Eliot also mentions in "The Music of Poetry" that poetry's music may not always be a smooth melody; rather, the poet may have other effects in mind than smoothness--he may choose "dissonance or even cacophony" to reinforce his meaning.

Finally, and most significantly, Eliot discussed in far greater depth the relation that the belief expressed in the poem had with the overall value of the work. In this area Eliot does admit to earlier bad judgments, and it does seem probable that, even had he never come to the traditional Christian position, Eliot would still have reached this point. It is a quite legitimate right of the poet to ask a reader to understand his belief, whether he agrees with it or not, and not base his evaluation of the art on the view expressed. But for the poet to ask the reader to ignore the philosophy expressed suggests that the poet failed either to see poetry as a totality or to credit his reader with intelligence. Eliot had removed himself from his earliest positions that the belief of the poet was of no real concern, and in his essay on Dante in 1929 he concludes that, indeed, the belief expressed can not be neglected. Lu hypothesizes that after his conversion Eliot may have placed greater emphasis on the moral duty of literature, but he sees this as only another aspect of Eliot's concern with a "unified scheme of action" (p. 38).

Early in the 1930's Eliot notes that the poet assumed a new role due to "the decay of religion, and the attrition of political institutions"; when these deteriorations occurred, many came to view the "poet as the priest." Eliot notes Arnold's discovery that, although poetry may

not be religion, it is probably the best substitute for it--a condition Eliot likened to "coffee without caffeine" (UP, p. 26). In his "Matthew Arnold" essay in 1933, Eliot declared that such a replacement could not be satisfactory, because "nothing in this world or the next is a substitute for anything else" (UP, p. 113). Kirk explains Eliot's view more fully by noting that Eliot agreed with Jacque Maritain's view of faith in poetry: "faith may suffuse poetry; a poem may lead men toward faith; but verse is not theology, and poetic sentiments cannot do duty for belief and religious knowledge" (p. 204). If a substitution would not meet Eliot's approval, certainly an ignoring of morality would not, during his later essays. In 1955 in "Goethe" Eliot admits that he would not defend everything he had said earlier--especially the place of ideas in poetry: he confesses his error in saying the poet does not have to believe the philosophy he uses. If the poet only used the idea, Eliot notes, the poetry would reflect this "insincerity," and thus only the technique of the poet would be of value (PP, p. 259). The artist may indeed "exploit" his belief for his art, Eliot states in "Literature and the Modern World," but it must not be a conscious act (America Through the Essay, p. 383). Eliot would no longer condone viewing the belief as inferior to other segments of the poem. Only with his own increasing wisdom, Eliot determined,

had he come to see that the wisdom which goes beyond the philosophy of the poem cannot be separated from the poem itself; this wisdom, which Eliot best defines as not that of the world, but of "spiritual sources," causes the poetry to be beneficial to all readers, whether they agree or not with the poet's particular philosophy (PP, pp. 256-64). And in an essay earlier in this period ("Thomas Heywood") Eliot admits that literature must be involved with morals, because they affect the reader's thought and action. Interestingly, Eliot in "Thomas Heywood" blamed the weaker artists for using "whatever morality is current, because they are interested not to analyze the ethics but to exploit the sentiment" (SE, p. 157). In "Religion and Literature" Eliot decides that religion and literature can not be separated--and he does not restrict the principle to that branch of literature which openly avows its religious intent. Eliot views the ignoring of basic beliefs as the great fault of modern literature. Now, he continues, literature must recognize and work with these old ideas, with the emphasis on the "primacy of the supernatural over the natural life." Eliot admits in this essay that he is looking for a literature that is "unconsciously Christian" (SE, pp. 347-54). By "unconsciously" Eliot probably refers to literature so permeated with Christian views that the author expresses them without feeling

self-conscious or defensive. This thorough acceptance Eliot believed Dante enjoyed. Eliot continues to stress that the philosophy expressed does not have to be accepted by the reader, but he must look at it as part of the poem, because "the notion of appreciation of form without content, or of content ignoring form is an illusion. . . . The meaning of a poem exists in the words of the poem and in the ideas or philosophy expressed (PP, pp. 263-63). Wilson, although disagreeing in 1931 with much of Eliot's expressed attitude toward the role of philosophy in art, rightly interprets Eliot to view philosophy or belief as one ingredient of poetry (p. 118).

As Kirk points out, the true artist cannot write poetry structured on reason; instead of using the tactics of the logician he "must offer images that wake emotions; his way toward truth is the leaping vision. He does not impart theology; rather, he makes it possible for his readers to understand religious beliefs" (p. 207). And in this, with poetry such as "Ash Wednesday" and especially Four Quartets, Eliot succeeded. The poet whose basic tenets about poetry had changed little, admitted in 1963 that, although some of his earlier attitudes have mellowed, still adhered to his belief in the ideas expressed in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (UP, p. 10).

Conclusion

If--as Eliot insisted often throughout his career--the poet tries to justify in his criticism the type of poetry he is writing, what does the poet offer to exemplify his theory? Eliot in his later poetry, especially Four Quartets, demonstrated what poetry should be. His art managed to incorporate those qualities he had so early stressed, and when in 1938 he offered the first of the Four Quartets, Eliot presented the flowering of that embryonic theory. His skill as an artist using the medium of words combined with his Christian belief to offer the reader a view of a Christian position in the twentieth century.

That Eliot did come to an acceptance of Christianity should have not surprised those who knew his thoughts. While Christianity offers a spiritual foundation for any individual, for the man such as Eliot, seeking order in a world apparently without it, and recognizing the great value of the past with all of its accumulated recognitions of truth, the Christian position is certainly one that satisfies. Morton Zabel in his essay "T.S. Eliot in Mid-Career" observes that Eliot's coming to an acceptance

of Christianity was not really surprising,[1] and Kirk also stresses this attitude. He labels Eliot's position as one of "rediscovery," arguing that Eliot never really opposed Christian dogma; he had only doubted its value. Considering the humanistic philosophical exposure, Kirk rightly notes that such a period of doubt is understandable (pp. 138-40). Anyone of Eliot's intellect would certainly have questioned and studied and evaluated thos thought systems that had had such force in the history of man. In the period following his entrance into the Church, speculation flourished as to how serious he was. Other important thinkers were turning to the political ideologies of the time, devoting themselves with great zeal to them. Some probably viewed Eliot's position in this light--Christianity would serve as a cause. Others like Yeats--as Richard Ellman reveals in the article "Yeats and Eliot"--thought that at best, Eliot could poetically exploit Christianity for symbolic purposes; at worst, Yeats viewed the conversion as Eliot's submitting to the old solutions instead of seeking new answers.[2] Yeats here touched on one aspect of Eliot's conversion. Eliot had commented on Dante's use of Christian theology as a framework for his poetry, and he had faulted other poets for lacking some system to give order and direction to their poetry. Beginning with "Ash Wednesday" Eliot used orthodox Christian thought for his scaffolding, drawing

many images from traditional Christian sources, but he did not stop with use of those images. He was able to take the language and situations of contemporary man and raise them to something suitable for religion. This remains one of the greatest accomplishments of the poet.

Eliot often commented throughout his critical career that whenever a poet theorized about poetry, usually it was an attempt to justify what he had written or hoped to write. As he pointed out in his "Review of Shakespeare by Middleton Murray" in the Criterion in 1936, the reader must consider the poet's statements as relative to his own poetry;[3] so when Eliot maintained in "Poetry and Drama" that the poet should take the "sordid, dreary, daily world" and make it appear "suddenly illuminated and transfigured," (SE, p. 87), he demanded that poetry be made a part of life, not something to be tolerated as superficial, and set himself the task of writing his "unconsciously Christian" poetry; he must take Christian thought and revitalize it. He must so adroitly manipulate the language that his reader can come to a better understanding of what it means to be Christian. As Kirk analyzes, Eliot's goal in Four Quartets is not to convey dogma, but "the experience of believing a dogma." This, Kirk believes, he accomplishes. He concludes that Eliot "affirms the poetic vision as a means to the apprehension of a transcendent order, and he offers a criticism both of blinkered unbelief and of the

illusion that poetry can do duty for religion" (pp. 294-95). Eliot, continuing to insist that poetry is not religion, has come to view poetry as an expression of those moments of grace when timelessness and time intersect, moments which Eliot realized occur infrequently for modern man. Having come through the despair, the pain of purgation, and the emptiness that follows, Eliot fashioned the language into an expression of the sense of beatitude. Lu blames Eliot now for becoming too indefinite in his poetry, claiming he, at the end, disregarded his dictate of preciseness, sacrificing it in recognition of vague, subconscious levels of thought that poetry might handle (pp. 130-31). What Lu and other critics who levy the same charge apparently ignore is that Eliot remained vitally interested in verbalizing clearly and definitely the indefinite. Only a poet who believed that the most inexpressible, fleeting moments should be dealt with as concretely as possible would write Four Quartets. Its imagery captures well the subtleties of these transcendent moments. Matthiessen, in a discussion of symbols Eliot used, vows that it remains a "function of poetry to break through our conventional perceptions, to startle us into a new awareness of reality" (p. 17). The reality of the Divine touching the human is what Eliot tries to put before his reader. He does explore; he does verbalize feelings and emotions so complex that the poetry's

language cannot be separated from the thought; Four Quartets would be most difficult to paraphrase--the attempts would require many more words than Eliot spent in the poem. As Gardner recognizes, in Four Quartets Eliot achieves a rare blending of words which become poetry; this to Gardner is another illustration of time in timelessness--the past and the future are woven in the poem (p. 9). She ascertains that the poem moves from very personal experiences to concrete ones--those "which persons can share to some extent" (p. 58). Eliot had commented in 1950, in "What Dante Means to Me," that the great poet not only leaves the language better than he found it, but he must go beyond "the frontiers of ordinary consciousness," then return and tell what he has found (CC, p. 134). Because the poet reports, the human sensibility enlarges, and the reader understands being human a little better.

Efforts to enlarge, or at least recognize, certain dimensions of the human experience are evaluated by Helen Gardner in Religion and Literature as she discusses the types of religious poetry written. She--like Eliot--recognizes that much "religious poetry" is of the devotional, praise-giving type. But she develops her concept of religious poetry in consideration of that written by Eliot and Hopkins. She concludes that the approach of great poetry to religion can be satisfying. Indeed, the

twentieth century in her opinion has produced some great religious poetry, although, like Eliot, she believes that the writing of great religious poetry today demands more of the artist, because he does not enjoy widespread acceptance of his philosophical framework and imagery. She credits Eliot's "straining" in Four Quartets to this situation. Gardner believes that Eliot's "cryptic obscurity" is a deliberate attempt to intrigue the reader to follow the poet, to see how fully he can come to terms with the attitudes expressed in the poem (p. 137). In this judgment Miss Gardner may well have penetrated to Eliot's central purpose as a Christian poet. As an artist, Eliot believed he must invoke tradition, expose unity and order in life, and make his reader more generally aware of what being human meant. As a Christian, he must add to these goals the need of teaching others the Christian position. By overlaying his artistic purposes with Christian ones, Eliot produced great poetry which was religious. In reproducing states of beatitude, he reminds the contemporary reader of a possibility outside the rational experience.

Because of his accomplishments as both poet and critic, T.S. Eliot holds a major position in the literature of the English language. His concept of poetry remains valid, and even those who consciously demand that poets write about the present, looking for answers not yet revealed, and perhaps like Wallace Stevens searching for

the ultimate embodiment of the humanist's dream, cannot escape from agreeing with much of Eliot's creed. Man will not be satisfied with that which says that the only source of beatitude available to man lies within him. Nor will he be content believing order can be imposed, and taken away, at man's will. Because man chooses to ignore spiritual realities, they do not cease to exist. Eliot once noted that art imposed order; he left unsaid--but certainly implied--that it does so through the rediscovery of old truths.

Russell Kirk, in discussing various attacks on and defenses of Eliot in 1940, included a thoughtful one by George Orwell--a man very caught up in politics. Orwell defended Eliot's position in 1917, when others had criticized him for not writing war poetry. Orwell credited Eliot with performing a more valuable service. In 1917, as Orwell remembered, an individual like Eliot could do nothing "except to remain human, if possible. . . . By simply standing aloof and keeping touch with pre-war emotions, Eliot was carrying on the human heritage" (pp. 20-21). As a Christian poet writing forty years later, he was doing the same, reminding us that this finite world did not have to be the boundary of experience.

These ideas, which Eliot developed over a thirty-year span, placed him in the front ranks of important critics. Widely read by those in the literary field,

Eliot's influence did not wane dramatically until the end of the 1950's; then with Karl Shapiro's attack, others began to question the validity of his position, but such a period of speculation and evaluation did not damage the theory. Although many of the younger poets and critics turned away from it, choosing to emphasize the subjective approach and often stressing an apparently hopeless situation, Eliot had a rather firm foundation for most of his beliefs, younger poets always using him as a point of departure. Certainly Eliot never claimed that his position was an original one, nor would he have denied the importance of earlier critics to his own work. Certain ideas about the nature of poetry have long been in existence. Eliot, though, always had his own interpretation even when his ideas were not new. Eliot's theory stresses that poetry must express truth, and one of Plato's concerns about art resulted from this problem; he feared that art--as an imitation--would not be truth, since it was only a copy of the idea. But Eliot insists that the artist must be responsible, and he is correct in his position. Plato's fear that art as imitation would deceive is understandable in light of his world view, although when evaluated today, it seems an unlikely result of poetry, even when the writer may give only a very limited perspective. To elevate a poet to the stature of a major artist, society should demand a sense of responsibility in the individual.

Although at certain times it appears that an artist has a rather limited view of truth, most important writers offer responsible positions. Eliot has also done so, as he makes his purposes clear.

Also, in dealing with the social obligations of the poet, Eliot never deviates from his position that, while poetry should reveal truths and increase man's awareness of his position, yet this service neither should nor could serve as poetry. Matthew Arnold, who believed that poetry will eventually replace religion as a holder and giver of ideas to society, pointed out that as the influence of religion decreases in a complicated and scientifically-oriented society, art alone will have the strength and audience to carry on man's moral heritage. Certainly the last century would appear to support such claims--the influence of religion greatly decreased and man searched for other sources of support and enlightenment. It is sadly true that often organized religions have not satisfied man's intellectual needs. Eliot, though, when arguing that poetry would not serve as a substitute for religion, did not undermine its value, agreeing that it has a moral, instructive quality. He convinces most readers that while poetry could offer much intellectually, aesthetically, and emotionally, it never satisfies man spiritually. This he correctly believes remains the function of religion, the reason, of course, being that

without dogma no system of morality--with any authority to it--can exist. Even with all its beauty and truth poetry is still unable to lean upon the higher supernatural foundation of legend where dogma can reside and from which it draws its moral sanction. It is this moral sanction which commands obedience as nothing in the secular world can so command. This separates Eliot from those who are purely humanistic and think that morality can effectively be based upon the secular world.

Another element of Eliot's theory, often been expressed before, is his emphasis on the value of tradition. Horace insisted that the poet should recognize and assimilate the wisdom of the past; similarly, Ben Jonson counseled that for one to write well, he must read well. Such a belief as this could be extended to the maxim that to live well, one should read well. Only by a careful scrutiny of the past, with an absorption of its wisdom, can man successfully deal with the world. Problems have not really changed; they may appear more complex, superficially, but underlying them run the same hopes and fears and dreams mankind has always confronted. This theory is a basis for a belief in education. If no value rested in the great books, why read them? Each moment of partial revelation that has been given man should take him one step further to a comprehension of truth.

Horace also cautioned that those who write to express individuality should be avoided; he and Eliot agree on this point. They--and others such as John Dryden and Philip Sidney--believe that art must reflect the universal. Dryden feels that the universals are best shown by examining specifics. Eliot agrees that the ego must be subdued. Man best relates to the individual example as long as it reflects a common situation. As Sidney rightly observes, the philosopher discusses concepts and the historian events, but both hope to come to a similar end--a clearer understanding of man's role. Even past romantic writers, often condemned by Eliot and others for emphasis on personal feelings and for excessive sentimentality, also saw a need for expressing moments most could recognize as part of their lives.

When Eliot wrote that the poet should preserve and purify the language, while adapting it to best serve his purpose, he followed in the tradition of Dante, who maintained that the poet's language should reflect the vernacular speech of his time, yet not be a slave to that language. The poet may modify and enlarge, as he must, to meet the needs of his art. Wordsworth argued a similar case for use of vernacular speech, but his poetry often fails to exemplify this. Much of Wordsworth's work appears artificial, although the words themselves are often taken from the vernacular of the time. Eliot

combined Dante's advice with that of Longinus, who argued that the language of poetry should be elevated and dignified, and took words and so meticulously used them that, even under the simplest circumstances, they become worthy of the term poetry. His language is much more vernacular than many are willing to credit him with, but it is also high and serious when the purpose of the work demands it. He is justified in this, too, for several reasons: one is the demand of the epic tradition such as that found in Four Quartets and The Waste Land; another is the demand of his subject matter; and one must admit Eliot's love for the elitist position in all things is another. One of his greatest contributions to the essence of poetry lies here. No one has ever used the language so uniquely--not even Hopkins, who fails to do so and keep it within everyone's traditional sense of usage. Perhaps the one area concerning language in which Eliot can be criticized is his failure to demand of the artist certain beauty and elegance in words such as that found in the poetry of Yeats. Although Eliot often mentioned the importance of musicality to poetry, he also says "there is no reason why verse intended to be sung should not present a sharp visual image or convey an important intellectual meaning, for it supplants the music by another means of affecting the feelings," (SW, p. 146). There remains another element of aesthetics in poetic language

which he failed to explore. Probably Eliot simply assumed that any poet strives to produce lines that are aesthetically satisfying, viewing beautiful lyrics as the most obvious result of his labors. However, Eliot touched on this phase only indirectly in cautioning poets not to sacrifice sense for sound. Eliot would have increased his contributions to the field of poetic theory had he devoted an essay to the direct role of aesthetics. Possibly he feared that to insist too strongly on this would have led him to a position akin to that of Baudelaire and his insistence that the concept of instructional poetry is heretical. Eliot really wanted both, and if at times his lines are not as graceful as some of Yeats, still they never offend the reader with any coarseness in structure, and he does offer a body of lyrical poetry represented by works such as "Preludes," "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," which shows his critics that he could write such lines if he chose. After these works he dared not be labeled an imitator, and he had his own goals to aim for, the main one being to use language well and to thereby keep it very much alive. That is the highest sense of aesthetics.

Eliot's legacy to the field of poetic theory remains unsurpassed. Although others have made great contributions, many of which Eliot used, his emphasis on the poet as scholar, moralist, and artist--a combining of wisdom,

truth, and beauty is valid for any period of literary history, serving future generations as well as his own.

Notes

Introduction

[1] T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism 7th ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1950), pp. ix, xx. Subsequent references to this work are indicated by the abbreviation SW in the text. Throughout this study second and subsequent references to a work will be handled parenthetically in the text.

[2] Russell Kirk, Eliot and His Age: T.S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 62-63.

[3] Fei-Pai Lu, T.S. Eliot: The Dialectical Structure of His Theory of Poetry (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 18.

[4] Armin Paul Frank, "Eliot's Objective Correlative and the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 30 (1972), 311.

[5] Lewis Freed, T.S. Eliot: Aesthetics and History (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1962), p. 86.

[6] Hugh Kenner, The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot (New York: Ivan Obolensky, 1959), pp. 45-47.

[7] Leonard Unger, T.S. Eliot, (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1961), p. 8.

[8] F.W. Bateson, "T.S. Eliot--Impersonality Fifty Years After," Southern Review, 5 (1969), 638.

[9] Ants Oras The Critical Ideas of T.S. Eliot (Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Press, 1969), pp. 108-09.

[10] F.O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T.S. Eliot: An Essay on the Nature of Poetry 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958), p. xx.

[11] Elizabeth Schneider, T.S. Eliot: The Pattern in the Carpet (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1975), p.11.

[12] Robert Martin Adams, "Donne and Eliot: Metaphysicals," The Kenyon Review, 21 (1954), 279.

[13] Frank Kermode, "Dissociation of Sensibility," The Kenyon Review, 19 (1957), 190.

[14] David J. Delauria, "Pater and Eliot: The Origin of the 'Objective Correlative'," Modern Language Quarterly, 26 (1965), 431.

[15] T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace,), p. 277, Subsequnnt references to this work are indicated by the abbreviation SE in the text.

[16] Richard Aldington, "A Critic of Poetry," Poetry, 17 (1921), 348.

Chapter One

[1] Stephen Tanner, "T.S. Eliot and Paul Lemer More on Tradition," English Language Notes, 8 (1971), 211-14.

[2] Grover Smith, Jr., "Getting Used to T.S. Eliot," English Journal, 49 (1960), 4.

[3] R.P. Blackmur, "In the Hope of Straightening Things Out," The Kenyon Review, 13 (1951), 310.

[4] p. 81. Lu later claims that Eliot views the progress of history as cyclical, but if this were true, it would contradict his definition of tradition not being repetition. If history were cyclical, nothing would be really new, nor could modification of the old order take place.

[5] Allen Austin, "T.S. Eliot's Theory of Dissociation," College English, 23 (1964), 310.

[6] Thomas Parkinson, "Intimate and Impersonal: An Aspect of Modern Poetics," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 16 (1958), 375-76.

[7] David E. Ward, "The Cult of Impersonality: Eliot, St. Augustine, and Flaubert," Essays in Criticism, 17 (1967), 175.

[8] T.S. Eliot, To Criticize the Critic (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1965), p. 175. Subsequent references to this work indicated by the abbreviation CC in the text.

[9] SE, p. 7. Interesting to note that in the essay "The Perfect Critic" Eliot demands a certain amount of impersonality in the reader. He states that the emotional response alone is not adequate because the reader would then be confusing the emotion evoked with the poetry. He concludes that "the end of the enjoyment of poetry is a pure contemplation from which all the accidents of personal emotion are removed" (SW, p. 14).

[10] Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S. Eliot (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1950), pp. 15-16.

Chapter Two

[1] Kirk stresses that the metaphysical speculations did not satisfy Eliot because he viewed them as too often the result of subjective views of relationships (p. 46).

[2] I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), p. 291.

[3] T.S. Eliot, "Mr. Middleton Murry's Synthesis," The Criterion, 6 (1927), 344-47.

[4] Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 126.

Chapter Three

[1] T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933; rpt. Glasgow: University Press, 1970), p. 106. Subsequent reference to this work are indicated by the abbreviation UP in the text.

[2] T.S. Eliot, On Poetry and Poets (New York: Noonday Press, 1943), p. 31. Subsequent references to this work are indicated by the abbreviation PP in the text.

[3] T.S. Eliot, "Literature and the Modern World," in America Through The Essay, ed. Theodore Johnson (New York: Oxford, 1938), p. 386.

[4] Leslie Paul, "A Conversation with T.S. Eliot," The Kenyon Review, 27 (1965), 17.

[5] T.S. Eliot, "Poetry and Propoganda," in Literary Opinion in America, ed. Morton D. Zabel (New York: Harper and Bros., 1951), p. 104.

[5] Mowbrey Allen, T.S. Eliot's Impersonal Theory of Poetry (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell Press, 1974), pp. 109-10.

[7] T.S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1971), p. 121

[8] D.W. Harding, "T.S. Eliot, 1925-1935," in T.S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Hugh Kenner (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1965), pp. 108-09.

Conclusion

[1] Morton Zabel, "T.S. Eliot in Mid-Career," Poetry, 36 (1930), 332.

[2] Richard Ellman, "Yeats and Eliot," Encounter, 25, No.1 (1965), 53-55.

[3] T.S. Eliot, "Review of Shakespeare by John Middleton Murry," The Criterion, 15 (1936), 708.

[4] Helen Gardner, Religion and Literature (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971) pp. 137-38.

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